

Duxbury Mariner  
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1845

# HINDSIGHT

## Fitted for College

By Jody Morgan

Can you imagine what the founders of Harvard College would have to say about today's admissions policies? Educating women was not part of their purpose. Sexism was definitely undesirable and religious preference was not an optional consideration. In fact, the primary motivation of the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony for establishing Harvard in 1636 was to educate young men for the ministry.

Boys were tutored in the classics by local clergymen who "kept" the Latin grammar schools as a supplement to their none-too-generous salaries. An academically gifted student could be fitted for college by the age of 12. Duxbury had its share of such grammar school instructors, beginning with William Wetherell (or Witherell), who first settled in our community in 1638 but moved to Scituate in 1658 to become the first pastor of Scituate's second parish.

For nearly 200 years, the system of college preparation changed little. Duxbury's sixth minister, Charles Turner, Harvard Class of 1752, accepted the town's call in 1754. He prepared George Partridge so well for college entrance that George was able to keep his own grammar school in Woburn while attending Harvard.

Partridge's plans to enter the ministry upon graduation in 1762 were put on temporary hold while he taught for a time in Kingston. Illness then forced him to reconsider his choice of careers, and he was engaged to instruct Duxbury's youth for \$8 a month from 1770 to 1773. When Partridge (who served as a representative to the Congress of the Confederation during the Revolutionary War and in numerous other offices thereafter) drew his will, he

thought again of his early callings and left equal amounts in trust for the salary of Duxbury's Congregational minister and the establishment of an academy to educate Duxbury students.

The concept of a privately endowed academy did not originate with the Honorable George Partridge. The Trustees of Derby Academy in Hingham were incorporated in 1784. In 1808 an academy opened in Hanover, admitting both girls and boys. But only boys were pre-

Point School set up the Mattakesett Republic in 1840, allowing students to govern themselves. Mary Rice was hired to teach at the private institution described above. Her contract, at her behest, limited the class to a maximum of 25 pupils, none under the age of 12. The oldest student, however, was Mary's senior by five months. Apparently, Miss Rice had an educational philosophy not unlike that of Mr. Gifford at the Point:

*I informed my pupils on the opening day that the school was*

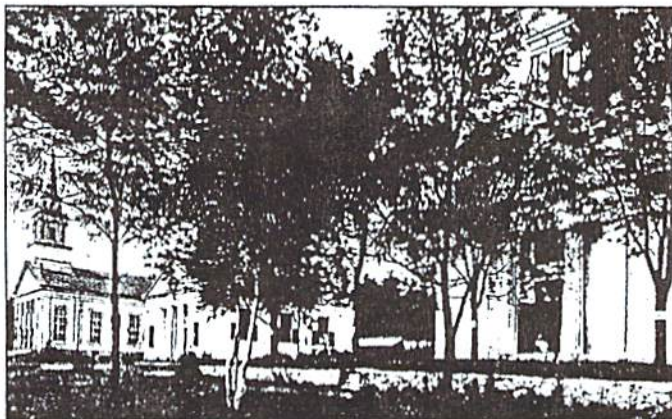
self-centered community in itself."

Picnics in the woods, fishing trips on Duxbury Bay and trips to the beach to view the aftermath of the latest storm gave the group a common perspective on the natural resources of their hometown. Astronomy was taught in the evening. The class took lanterns to a convenient hill-top to view the heavens. Botany lessons were conducted in the field.

On one memorable occasion, the group failed to take adequate account of the tide. Stranded on Clark's Island until the wee hours of the morning, the students returned to their homes in high spirits despite the long row across the water. As the tide had come in, the wind had gone out.

Today textbook companies are marketing reading programs that substitute trade books for the old-fashioned formula writing of traditional reading texts. Mary Rice took the liberty, more than 150 years ago, to do the same. "We abolished the 'school readers,' and selected instead new publications of the day, either in prose or poetry, which were interesting to young people, and then acquainted ourselves thoroughly with the sketch, story, or poem, and with the history and character of its author."

How long this institution existed is unclear. Just when Partridge Academy was about to welcome its first students, Mary Rice married Duxbury's Universalist minister, Daniel Parker Livermore. As she left to join her husband in Fall River, where he had moved a few months before their wedding, her pupils transferred to Partridge Academy. There boys continued to be fitted for college, while girls at last enjoyed the same preparation, although they lacked equal opportunity for a college education for many years to come.



Partridge Academy, pictured at the left where Duxbury Town Hall now stands, educated both boys and girls.

Photo Courtesy of Duxbury Rural & Historical Society

pared for college entrance. Females were instructed in the fine arts of painting and embroidery.

Although Partridge died in 1828, the stipulation in his will that the endowment of \$10,000 should be invested and held in trust until the fund was sufficient for building and maintaining the facility on a large scale prevented the trustees from opening Partridge Academy until 1845. As Mary Rice Livermore writes in her autobiography: "Some of the more intelligent people of the town, who were interested in the advance of higher education, had therefore decided that a private school must be maintained to bridge over this hiatus of years, and to prepare their children for entrance to the Academy.... The Academy was to admit both sexes, and to fit boys for college."

Shortly after the public

to be self-governed; there were to be no punishments for offenses, no rewards for well doing. Each one must conform to the rules of the school as a matter of honor, or must leave it. Every young man was expected to be a gentleman, every one of the young girls a lady. They must master their studies, not that they might avoid losing a place in the class, or to gain a better position, but for the sake of the knowledge that would result from their efforts.

Outward Bound experiences are now in vogue to create bonding among college freshmen and even among students at prestigious private schools. Duxbury's fifth-grade outdoor education camping trip has been popular for many years. But Mary Rice was ahead of her time when she introduced the concept of excursions as a way of drawing her students together in what she characterizes as "a